

Academician Bertoleza and the Giant Burocrator

Or,

Of how Mrs Feldspato's son ended up
in Bigo de Fora

Being a faithfull Report, such as Memory allows,
of the Exquisite Academic Adventures
of a Disciple of the Great Zweifele in the Tropics

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CHAPTER 1

Dr Feldspato

Dr Feldspato is the son of Mrs Feldspato. He is extremely competent. He is just back from the United States, where he studied with the famous psychophysicist Ernest Zweifele. Himself. Did I say famous? Need not have mentioned it. Zweifele, who showed that time is round and space is square. Zweifele, creator of the quantum superstring slingshot. Zweifele, German and citizen of the World, whose discoveries made philosophy impossible and war useless, better known popularly for his eccentric habits and irreverent opinions. “The Earth will be a world when people become human.” Zweifele, besides everything a virtuoso of the well-prepared harpsichord, in his later years had just one student and disciple: our Dr Feldspato.

Why one only? Whoever wants to know should read any of the excellent scientific biographies — some already translated into Portuguese — of Zweifele, who is not the protagonist of our story. Rather, that is Dr Feldspato, born in Bom Retiro, the grandson of a seller of shmates — the politically correct expression would be “entrepreneur in the environmentally sustainable textiles industry” — professor at Universidade Sidereal of Bigo de Fora.

And how come the only student of the great Zweifele ended up in Bigo de Fora? Let us start with a flashback.

CHAPTER 2

In the time of the vacuum tubes

It was the time when transistors spake.

Dr Feldspato studied at Universidade Rupestrian of Boupinel, the most famous and traditional in Brazil. Famous, perhaps, after all it is among the top 100 universities in the world according to the ranking of the student weekly published at the University of Hong Kong and Shanghai, Pty Ltd. Traditional, more or less. Bologna, Paris, Oxford, are almost a millennium in age. From the top of the University of Memphis, 40 centuries watch over us. Even Harvard — where Dr Feldspato would later obtain his doctorate — is older than it in months than last hour in seconds, let alone a baker's dozen thousand contos de réis richer. URUBU is more recent — it was established by a close childhood friend of Feldspato's grandmother, the mother of Mrs Feldspato. And less well-endowed. It keeps in a vault under lock and key the bus tokens and meal tickets that can only be used by the dons on ceremonial occasions. Well, it is the oldest university of the Lower Left Bank of the Tamanduateí River in São Paulo, and that is what matters. The shadow of tradition echoes in its corridors, its taste visible in the weight of the air. That is where Dr Feldspato did his undergraduate studies.

Undergraduate studies, so to speak. He was admitted to the major of Phyto-linguistics at the Professional School of Philosophy. Let it be said, with the highest grade point average of any freshman in the history of the university entrance examinations at URUBU: four point one. To this day no one knows where the extra zero point one came from, specially considering that his written composition on the theme “A spurious alliance between corrupt generals and psychotic intellectuals” earned him the lowest possible grade in the Portuguese language examination: it was during the dictatorship. But this is water under the bridge, and water under the bridge does not wind turbines move. The fact is, he entered URUBU before age 17. He did not have a car, the university was too far from home, and after the Army broke the locks of the student dorms they were empty for many years waiting for the procurement order for new handles, so he brought a sleeping bag and moved to the library, which was always empty anyway because no one read books.

And that is where he found out that the Phyto-linguistics major was not for him. Do not take this personally: nothing against the faculty members, most of them earnest, several literate, some even brilliant. It was not lack of interest on the subject either: since he was in high school the future Dr Feldspato (called by the nickname “Quartz” on account of his mania for building quantum oscillators) cultivated a fascination with Phyto-linguistics. The problem was that to spend 5 years following the ideal required curriculum, beginning with Phyto-linguistics CIV, which was a prerequisite for PHTL CII, in turn a prerequisite for PHTL CCII, this a post-requisite for Phytoli CXV and simultaneous requisite for Phytoli CDVI, and so on, required an elephant's patience. Specially between the ages of 22 and 17, a time of intellectual and visceral unrest. Flunk a course, lose a whole year. Those who don't cheat, don't cross the finish line, as they say.

Since the name of the game in school was cheating, Quartz spent his time building quantum oscillators, and playing Go. Why Go? He had read in the Applied Differential Geometry textbook that Go was to Chess as Philosophy was to double-entry accounting. But in high school it had been a requirement to take a so-called professional training subject, even though the students later decided to go to college and do something unrelated. The headmaster was no idiot, so two options were offered: Accounting and Dactyloscopy. They used to say that Accounting was good work for men, and Dactyloscopy was an appropriate profession for women. So the boys chose Dactyloscopy, to watch the girls, and the girls chose Accounting, so they would be in the same class with the boys. Although it made no difference, the lectures were given at the same time, in the same classroom, by the same instructor, who taught Latin grammar review for the university entrance examinations. The university did not

require exams in either Accounting or Dactyloscopy, so it was not worthwhile to waste time with professional training. The future Dr Feldspato, at that time not yet called Quartz, though he was already a contrarian, chose Accounting. Now he did not like the mug of the Latin grammar instructor, so he became averse to this Accounting business. The one positive side was that, because the class was large, the lectures happened in the new Auditorium, which had soft, comfortable chairs. It was possible to take a nap. This simple fact was going to change all of Feldspato's future. Read on, you will understand.

Philosophy no one ever forced him to study, so it seemed more interesting than Accounting. (This was before he became familiar with Zweifele's work.) In fact the students of the Bachelors in Phyto-linguistics degree program at the Professional School of Philosophy were not allowed to register for the Philosophy courses, because the department of Philosophy reserved those studies exclusively for the students of the Guild of Philosophy's accredited degree program. The subjects that were not required, were forbidden, and what is forbidden always appears more interesting. Therefore he played Go rather than Chess.

The reader may be somewhat confused here. So was Quartz. As were his friends. The only ones who were not confused were the dons at the Professional School of Philosophy. They knew exactly what should be taught to undergraduates of each program and department. With absolute certainty, without a shadow of doubt. They taught what they had been taught. The Truth. And Truth is Painful. The Phyto-linguistics students were going to be employed by the state-owned Brazilian Phyto-Linguistic Enterprises, it was during the time of government monopoly and market protectionism. They had no time to waste with the divagations of the Philosophers! And the Philosophy students were going to be practitioners of Philosophy, the critical conscience of the Nation, following rigorously the teachings of their professors. How could they be at the whim of the labor market, learning market-oriented commercial skills such as Phyto-linguistics?

The objective reality is that Quartz played Go during lecture hours.

* * *

Who was really good in Un-applied Phyto-linguistics was Edson. As we know, Quartz had the highest grade of all incoming students in the history of the entrance examinations at URUBU. Read carefully: the highest grade of all incoming students, not the highest grade in the history of the examinations. The highest grade of all had been Edson's, four point four, a feat that cannot be equaled. But he did not begin his studies at URUBU that year because he had not finished high school yet. He was younger than Feldspato's class, and they knew each other from the Accounting class. Edson took Dactyloscopy in his freshman year in high school, see how hardworking he was? Not that he cared an iota for Latin grammar, much the contrary, he had grade zeroball in the examinations, a fact that makes his four point four grade average even more impressive. But at home there was too much pressure to study all the time, so he took Dactyloscopy in his first year in order to sleep in the comfortable chairs.

After he passed the university entrance examinations already in his first year of high school, his family relaxed a little, relatively speaking, so he was able to study only what he enjoyed. He never studied Latin again, nor Dactyloscopy. The headmaster could not care less, after all he had already passed his exams, as far as the school was concerned he was already a success story.

But some complications happened thanks to URUBU. Every student that started some degree program at URUBU soon realized that that program he got into was not quite the one he would like to follow, so he would take the entrance examinations again, for any other program, in the illusion that the other one was in fact something different. The same thing happened with the second program. And so on and so on, until the illusions ended. Edson himself was no exception, he changed majors several times. This dilettante habits of the student body caused endless disturbances in the classroom allocation process. As Prof Marcondes, who was head of the committee that oversaw the computer registration system, explained in a lapidary statement: "To the University there exist no students, no courses, no professors. What exists is the System, Quíron."

A great thinker, Prof Marcondes. His claim to fame was the proof that it is impossible to do Integral Calculus in more than three or four dimensions — as we know, no electric circuit can have more than three capacitors, or three inductors, or at most two capacitors and two inductors. Afterwards he was commissioned to a post at the syndicate of employers of domestic workers, he became very busy, every year he discharged of the same teaching load, so we are going to lose sight of him in our story. That is a pity, he had a long perspective. He taught the same course identically every year, and he was one of the very few faculty members who had the experience and the knowledge to affirm categorically that the students were getting weaker and weaker, and less motivated.

Prof Marcondes fought against students' dilettantism. This story, each student wishing to learn whatever he or she found interesting, worse of all with the assent of certain subversive faculty members, was wreaking havoc with the calendar and schedules. And there was the issue of the so called vacant slots, caused by students who abandoned a major in the misguided and juvenile hope of finding something more profitable to study. So the university had issued an edict that forbade people who had passed the entrance examinations from taking them again for a period of four years. The goal was to bring into line and rationalize the utilization of desks and blackboards. Besides that, for a while the slots in different professional schools were allocated among the students who had passed the entrance examinations by lottery, to prevent the students with higher grades from concentrating on the more appealing programs.

Edson could not begin his university studies, he had not finished high school. Neither could he take the exams again because of the edict, he had already been approved once. So he was going to waste several years, or he would have to study abroad. Let us agree, a fellow with his credentials, studying at the Universidade Sidereal of Bico de Fora, which during those years was establishing a School of Resources and Nets for Deep Ocean Fishing in a new campus near the Bolivian border, that would be absurd! But during the school vacation he visited an uncle who lived in the country, out there by the way of Uberaba. A while before a fire had burned through the Civil Registry there, so he was able to request a new birth certificate, exchanging his first and second names. It sounded rather odd, Heisuke Edson as opposed to Edson Heisuke, but he was very close to his family and did not want to go abroad for his studies, so he opted for taking in the jokes. The following year he came up with an algorithm to achieve precisely the minimal grade to be approved in the university entrance examinations. He would not have been a good engineer, the algorithm left no safety margin, but it worked. He was the last one called in the waiting list. Officially, the 4 point 4 of his first exam did not count. Everybody knew who he was, the regulations were not being followed, but legally the university could not do anything against him. Nor did it want to do. At URUBU, no one had ever rebelled against an opportunity to do nothing.

Nothing, besides playing Go. But it was not with Edson that Quartz played, Edson did not play hooky. I shall tell you more later.

CHAPTER 3

Academician Bertoleza and the Giant Burocrator

“What about Academician Bertoleza? And the Giant Burocrator?” my dear reader ought to be asking. Ought to be asking, no, is asking, as I know very well. My email Inbox is already full with questions about them. “After all,” they let me know, “I have the deepest respect for Dr Feldspato, the student of the great Zweifele, and his contribution to the development of our country’s science cannot ever be underestimated. But frankly, I would not understand what he wrote, even if I were the man who knew Javanese. Pages and pages of partial differential equations. What is this alternate control system, really?” Everybody wants to read about Academician Bertoleza, councilor to the President of the Republic, opinion writer at Working People’s Daily News, and the Giant Burocrator, sometimes considered to be the éminence grise of the regime.

I can only ask the reader for a little patience. Writing this column, that’s not something I am paid to do. Truth be said, I write during breaks between department meetings, or at most I type surreptitiously with my pinky while I listen attentively to the discussions, incredibly relevant all of them, but a little on the long side. “I have a travel report to hand in,” I give as an excuse, when someone catches me clicking furtively. Neither Feldspato, nor Bertoleza, nor Burocrator suspect that they are being observed. Otherwise, it would be the end of the story. If they catch me, I lose my parnusse, then I would have nothing else to tell. Please be patient, and wait for your turn.

Speaking of travel report, next week I will be away, so I am sending in some old verses just to fill up the space. If you are only into prose you do not even need to read. But please do not forget to submit the request for leave annexed to the Genial Helmsman of the Præsidium of the Central Departmental Council.

* * *

I hereby request a leave of body and soul without loss of remuneration or other benefits during the next coming and subsequently hebdomadal week to take part in a conference of the greatest scientific and technological relevance, national and international although by no means neoglobalized.

During my absence my duties will be discharged by my substitute, the Illustrious Mr Prof Dr Respectable Poet Anonymous du Siècle XX.

Without more for the moment, I make use of the opportunity to reiterate my most elevated protestations of unquenchable esteem and exquisite consideration, and very truly faithfully I sign.



Where do I sign?

CHAPTER 4

Anonymous du Siècle XX

The lectures of the barons embattled
In the legitimate Lusitanian bureaucracy
By the immigrants' hand were forged
For the brave tropical bourgeoisie
In tenements never before windowed
By philosophy, wisdom, or human science
 Sleeping I played hooky morn and eve,
 Whoever would know more, please wait.

The perfidious Albion who motivated
By empire, pride, or moolah
The waters at Traição had raised
In order to tame the Mogiana
Searching for Rubiaceae had engineered
Light, railroads, and posh suburbs.
 Thirst for knowledge behind thickets,
 Is not missing, the money is not there.

In the floodplain of the river rectified
With muscle, sickle, mule, and chainsaw
The hard soil had sublimated
Latin-American alma mater
A modern tradition, weight of the Fado
Province of Anchieta's scholastics.
 The state taxes supported,
 In the tropics, an elephantine academy.

Gloomy freshmen were greeted
Absent professors — by bureaucracy
Of the old Burroughs to the punched cards
Reporting, the beadles exhibited
Hundreds of courses were offered —
An inflexible giant made the choice.
 Pretends to be a cathedral of learning,
 Enormous bureaucracy, tiny students.

The contents of courses were duplicated
Mechanics Physics Engineering
Newton learned through one text
In one would earn an A, in the other an F
Programs and algorithms compiled
By hand, in each a different philosophy.
 Departments that classified knowledge,
 Did not know each other's science.

Councils for a distant past longing
— Freshmen ran away from classrooms —
As a vengeance had destined
By means of a tricky edict
Students to the courses they disdained —
Studies of ancient engineering.
 "Flunking a year is all we can hope for,
 Trying again for the test in the forest."

Finding themselves interested
In a subject where there was a specialist
A professor who had accepted them
As learners and pupils, a list
Of very dedicated students
Wrote a very realistic petition
 To the Giant that denied knowledge,
 Burocrator, reading punched cards.

A whole five years had been forgotten
In the School, under the Giant's orders
Reason, whom Terror had absorbed
Subtle like a flock of oliphants.
Denying that which had been petitioned:
"For us neither courses nor students
 Exist, nor professors," they heard,
 "For URUBU what exists is Quíron."

Already six summers had gone by
Of studies every hour of the week
That youngsters who had never flunked
(Weary of inhumane exams)
Searching for the goal of the diploma
Shouted, ignoring arcane rules:
 "Playing hooky I'll run with strong legs,
 So help me luck and the cheat sheet."

Anônimo do século XX

As aulas dos barões encastelados
Na lídima burocracia lusitana
Que à mão do imigrante eram forjados
Por brio e burguesia tropicana
Taperais nunca de antes fenestrados
Por filó, saber, ou ciência humana
Dormindo cabulei manhã e tarde,
Quem mais quiser saber, então aguarde.

O pérfido albião que motivado
De império, por orgulho, ou pela grana
As águas à Traição tinha elevado
Sedento em desbravar a Mogiana
Buscando a rubiácea engendrado
Luz, trem havia, e o bairro do bacana.
É a sede de saber trás espinheiros,
Que não falta, só faltam os dinheiros.

Na várzea do caudal retificado
A muque, foice, burro e motoplana
A terra dura havia sublimado
Escola-mor latino-americana
Moderna tradição, peso do Fado
Província da escolástica anchietana.
Imposto estadual estabelecia,
Nos trópicos, 'fantal academia.

Os tristes calouros recepcionados
Ausente professor — burocracia
Dos burroughs os cartões perfurados
Reportando, o bedel lhes exibia
Centenas eram cursos ofertados —
Gigante inflexível que escolhia.
Pretende catedral ser do ensino,
Burocracia enorme, aluno pequenino.

Nos cursos conteúdos duplicados
Mecânica-física-engenharia
O Newton por um texto estudado
Um dava dez, mas outro zeraria
Programas e algoritmos compilados
No braço, em cada qual filosofia.
A gente que o saber delimitara,
Do feudo do vizinho era ignara.

Conselhos de um longínquo passado
Saudosos — bicharal da aula fugia —
Vingando-se, haviam destinado
Por meio de ardilosa portaria
Alunos a seus cursos desdenhados —
Estudos de anciã tecnologia.
“Bombar de ano é só o que nos resta,
Tentar opção de novo, ser floresta.”

Se encontrando em uma tal interessados
Disciplina em que existia especialista
Professor que os havia aceitado
Como alunos e ouvintes, uma lista
De estudantes todos muito dedicados
Dirigiram petição bem realista
Ao Gigante que o saber lhes denegava,
Burocrator, que os cartões esquadrihava.

Um lustro todo haviam olvidado
Na escola, sob as ordens do Gigante
Razão, que o Terror tinha tragado
Sutil qual revoada de alufantes.
Negando o que haviam demandado:
“Para nós nem cursos nem os estudantes
Existem, nem professores,” ouviram,
“Pra URUBU o que existe é o Quíron.”

Porém já seis verões eram passados
De estudos toda hora da semana
Que jovens nunca dantes reprovados
(Fadiga e provarada desumana)
Buscando o alvedrio diplomado
Clamavam, despeitando a regra arcana:
“Colando fugirei com perna forte,
Se a tanto me ajudar paiol e sorte.”

CHAPTER 5

Baduk in the kitchen, Sinhá wants not

As we were telling, Quartz played Go with his friends.

But he did not play for a long time. The Go tournaments took place in the “kitchen,” the game room of the Student Athletic Union. In the past, the legend went, the kitchen had been an Alchemy laboratory. As there not longer was an Alchemy degree program at the Philosophy School, the space became vacant, and was being used by the students. This was one of those persistent urban myths, like the one that said that the building had been built upside down, with the lightning rods serving as electric grounding and the gutters washing the sewage away. Everybody repeated that this was the reason why the whole school smelled bad. Sure it made no sense, but there was no way of disproving, because the architectural drawings were kept in the vault together with the bus tokens and meal tickets for the dons, and the employee who knew the combination was not very assiduous.

Even more doubtful is that an old Alchemy laboratory might have been abandoned. If there had been a laboratory, that is because there was a Chair. And if there was a Chair, then there was a full professor. The full professor, incumbent of the Chair, would surely have hired an associate, who in turn would have had a reader and a master of conferences, each one of them a lecturer, and the lecturers their teaching assistants. As the cathedrae were extinguished by the Higher Education Reform, by now we would have one or two departments of Alchemy taking turns to use the same equipment, bought with funds from the Alliance for Progress. Perhaps even, depending on the political compositions of the characters, an Institute of Alchemy, with the Meeting Room of the Congregation of the Institute of Alchemy occupying the ancient laboratory, where a mezzanine would have been built for the offices of departments of Marxist Alchemy, Bombastic Alchemy, Paracelsic Alchemy, and Experimental Alchemy. The disciplines General Alchemy I and IV, with the same content but taught by different departments, would be required of all freshmen at URUBU, given the weight of the Alchemists’ vote in the Venerable University Council.

Very few students interested, however, Alchemy is a little out-of-fashion. Unless the Ministry of Science and Speleology had at some point required every industry to hire an Alchemist-in-charge. This has not happened. I say it and I prove it.

THEOREM 5.1. *No Alchemy Laboratory has ever existed at Boupinel.*

PROOF. Let us assume for the sake of argument that such a laboratory had existed. If that had happened, there would have been jobs for Alchemists, because of the argument presented above, and if there had been jobs for Alchemists, those kinds of jobs with wages, the Chaired Professor would not have managed to hire all his adjuncts and assistants. Who would accept that pittance that URUBU paid? No department would have ever been formed. Without a department, there would not have been anyone to persuade the minister of the need to proclaim a decree regulating the profession of Alchemist. *Reductio ad absurdum. Ipso facto. A fortiori. Quod erat demonstrandum. Omen v’omen.* □

Had there existed the legendary Alchemy Laboratory, it would be there now. Since it is not, we know it never was. If you are still uncertain, just go the library read the booklet “The Professional School of Philosophy in Brazil has a Glorious Past and a Promising Future.” If you manage to find it. Last time I checked, the catalog listed it as “unavailable.” They say a former cabinet minister built his famous private collection of rare

and expensive books with volumes borrowed from the URUBU library, who knows if it is true? Ask Feldspato, he used to live in the library, perhaps he knows.

In any case, between one urban myth and the other the students used the kitchen as recreation area. Until one day “Sinhá,” the doyenne of the school, issued a decree banning the game of Go, which because of its complexity took time away from study. In fact Go, or Baduk as it is called in Korea, was potentially a very subversive activity. Even more than chess, Go is a game–art–science that destroys the disciplinary separatrixes which are so indispensable to the healthy functioning of a university where the diversity of the academic traditions of each feudal specialty must be respected.

Although he sometimes spilled the stones on the tatami, Quartz had sort of learned to play properly, and he wanted to continue, become a new chess player, a cripto-go player, whatever. But he had no one else to play with. After Go was banned, he joined Madeira in the cards as a truco–playing double. A pair of good suit, they often won. College for them went by like this, playing truco and building oscillators. Actually, that was the time of trade restrictions, the store was good for nothing, both of them supported their studies manufacturing and selling oscillators.

* * *

Some readers may now imagine that the doyenne, authoritarian, intolerant, reactionary, who interfered with students’ life instead of being concerned with their studies, could be Academician Bertoleza. They would be completely wrong. Nothing further from the truth. With regard to the students Bertoleza was a democrat, a true scientist. Respectful and encouraging, she was admired by the student body. She taught, graded papers firmly but fairly, often after having actually read them with her own eyes.

She was not one of those quacks who calls a friend to give a pep talk in lieu of a class and does not show up even to change the slide projector’s lightbulb. *[The raccoon metaphor was poorly chosen. Dele?]* A student can smell quackery miles away, the way a raccoon can smell a bag of snacks forgotten outside the campsite. Smells it, and stays away. Quackery, *[Stet. I have another deadline blowing up. That’s the danger of reasoning by metaphor. Did you not take Bertoleza’s Intro to Logic course?]* no one ever hides inside the trunk. Those who are most guilty are the least aware. It is out there, exposed, for whoever passes nearby, with or without a robber’s mask covering the eyes, to see and smell, like a naked king. Academician Bertoleza was the main force behind the success of the post–graduate school at the Professional School of Philosophy. The undergraduate students would come anyway, not because the course was useful, but because the rest of the courses they also did not know what they were for, they needed a degree, and anyway it was free. So they took her courses, they were treated like people, and decided to stay on for graduate school. With the salaries that people were being paid out there, it was not worth working anyway. *[The course, or her newspaper articles?]* *[It was a rhetorical question. That tabloid of yours, I know you are the only editor who reads it, and in school you were her biggest groupie.]*

The rest of the faculty advised the rest of the Academician’s class. The graduate school in fact was her. As an adviser, she was an example of professionalism. She encouraged creative research, chose appropriate themes for the interests and abilities of each student, procured scholarships and grants for empirical research, read and corrected each line of articles and theses, and finally used her contacts to guarantee the employment of each of her advisees. In this last point, I hope no one is hearing, she followed the model of the best North American universities. And go find jobs for everyone! Students and more students, dozens every year, the critical conscience of the nation, present in each branch of each government agency. Analyzing. Critiquing. Verifying. Blocking. Obstaculizing any initiative that could put in jeopardy the higher values of the nation. Raising objections against concessions contrary to our collective achievements. Defending the acquired rights against the threat of neoliberal productivism. Reinstating, embargoing, counter–embargoing, counter–reforming, and counter–torpedoing.

Some people say it is a little too much. Better criticize a little less, and let someone with the higher education offered at URUBU, after all everyone agreed that for better or for worse it was the country’s intellectual elite,

some graduates at least, we were saying, could be paying taxes instead of living at the taxpayer's expense. This kind of criticism always originated from the most reactionary sectors, those without any critical sense, blind servers of big capital, libertarian, anarchic, globalized, nationless. It was fruit of the meanest resentment, generally from people who had not completed their doctorates at URUBU.

Including some people we will meet shortly..... But we will get to them soon enough. We were talking about Academician Bertoleza. In first place, she had no nicknames. She liked to be called by the prestigious title, Academician give us the honor, Academician would you be so kind, Academician do us the favor of letting us know... But she had no ambition of personal power. She was not, and never would have been, the dean. Her name always came up at the time of elections, but it never appeared in the sextuple lists of possible candidates for a deanship or rectorship. The conspiracy theory folks would say..... precisely, that it was a conspiracy of international media and foreign capital with the governor's party. The governor changed parties, the party changed governors, the conspiracy theory continued. Calumny. A campaign for the completion of a sextuple list is a serious thing. It requires effort and time. And time was not something Academician Bertoleza had to spare. Didn't we say that she read all her students' theses? And truth be told she wrote a fair share of them? She was totally dedicated to her students. When was the last time that you saw a pre-candidate to alternate member of the electoral college to elect a sextuple list getting even close to a classroom? When was it, tell me. I know, I know, that was for the dedication of the commemorative plaque of room number 3.14R2 of the windowless building everybody calls Uncle Scrooge McDuck's Money Bin.

"This commemorative plaque was a gift of the United Scrooge McDuck Enterprises, being Dean of the School the Illustrious Mr Prof Dr Joe Doe, with the presence of the Pre-Candidates to Members of the Sextuple List the Most Excellent Messrs Profs Drs Bob Schmoe and Mike Sixpack, etc. etc. etc."

After that, near a classroom, any other time? That Room 3.14R2 has been locked ever since, so that no one is tempted to steal the plaque. That, you call a classroom?

There was no conspiracy. Academician Bertoleza did not run for member of the sextuple list because of absolute lack of time and personal ambition. She was incorruptible. Those are the most dangerous people. Write down what I am saying, later you can check.

CHAPTER 6

Phyto–linguistics

The funny thing is that no one had stopped enjoying Phyto–linguistics. The interest dated from high school when students secretly read scientific magazines during the boring classes that readied them for the test prep courses. There was an informal competition among the high school students. The goal was to write a software program for a vacuum–tube powered slide rule that was capable of solving the problems in the Higher Phyto–linguistics Exercise Manual¹, with the smallest possible number of millibytes. If you know Dr Feldspato’s research you may recognize some of the names. For it was the very same Rokhlin who proved Ivanov’s Least Effort Principle — a fundamental result, later extended by Feldspato, concerning the impossibility of a corrupt politician waking up behind bars. “Who, then,” a reader might ask, “chose the name of Ivanov’s Least Effort Principle?” Rokhlin himself answers: “Myself.” And, “Why did you call it Ivanov’s Least Effort Principle?” I once had the occasion to ask Rokhlin. “Because Ivanov told me to give it this name.” Academician Ivanov was a party member. Rokhlin, just look at his name, no need to ask.

That was in Russia. In Brazil, where no one paid too much attention to events overseas, “Ivanov” was simply a good, cheap, and popular textbook. Whoever managed to solve the problems, using a 5 millibyte slide rule, generally ended up been expelled from the test prep lectures in less than 4 minutes. The first one to finish was invariably Carolina. Although sometimes people might not notice that she was the first, because Carolina was very shy and given to prayers. She arrived to class either too early, or a little late, sat all the way in the back, and promptly fell asleep. Or maybe she sat there reading poetry in the classical languages. She did not call much attention to herself, except when she got hold of the slide rule. Then the whole class sighed. Also when someone brought a guitar and she sang. Her daughter, who does not nearly have her voice, is now a musician, a successful soloist. Despite her talents, Carolina was scared of exams, and did not get into URUBU. There is no need to miss her: soon we will hear news from her again.

So when they got to college, the students knew more about Phyto–linguistic calculus than their professors. However Phyto–linguistic calculus was not a subject for freshmen, to study it a student required a certain maturity, so the calculus was taught in the course PHTL CCDXXXI beginning in the 3rd year. Until then, there was a whole sequence of pre–requisites..... Most students gave up. In some years none of the 60 thousand students at Boupinel graduated. They then changed the statute of limitations, declared an amnesty, gave out retroactive diplomas, tweaked the honors code, suspended the offside rule, accepted the Glasgow Manifesto, created study committees, whistled in the happiness train, they worked it out somehow.

* * *

Quartz had a close friend, Winston, who loved cinema. He watched all the movies. Winston was a very fine fellow, well–read, from a good family. Franco–egyptians. His parents were architects, both partners of a world–class firm, they worked rather long hours. So Winston was the one to help in his grandfather’s shop, which is what supported the whole extended family. He spent the afternoons behind the counter, with the latest number of “Cahiers du Cinéma” that they brought over from France. French, by the way, was almost a second mother language. When the market was slow, as in the time of the Rational Economic Plan, he screened an old movie in the office in the attic. After closing, he would find the time to drop by a theater downtown.

¹Textbook authored by Comrade Academician Prof Dr Yu I Ivanov, written by B Ya Rokhlin, Candidate of Sciences, based on lecture notes for the course Advanced Phyto–linguistics taught at the Tsar Nicolai of All Russias University, volume printed in Portuguese, in Moscow, in the year 67 of the Most Generous Revolution.

Often he arrived to school late, but in good humor. If by mistake both forgot to play hooky at the same time, Winston would say:

— You there in the Anti-Globalization II class, Feldspato — he called his friend by the surname — looks like Woody Allen visiting his fiancée's family. Let's go see that retrospective at the film club, they are showing "Le Voyage de Blaise Cendrars au Brésil." This afternoon I have to be in the city anyway.

After graduation, Winston won a public competition for a judgeship at the Sports Tribunal. Soon afterwards there was a major scandal, they applied the juniors' rule "3 corners equals one penalty" in the final playoffs. You remember, Brazil was almost expelled from the World Cup. Winston was the only official whose name was clean. There were years when he was the lone whistle for all championship games, except for the home games of the Corrections team, those had dozens of referees. Nowadays Winston occupies an important post at the Sports Federation, in his spare time he produces indie movies.

CHAPTER 7

Philosophy of yore

Coming back from Boupinel, to get home there was a traffic jam that was wider than it was long. It was forbidden to cross it on foot, because it would disturb the traffic flow, they said, although the cars were not getting anywhere, what difference could it make? The real problem is that if a driver gave up waiting and started walking, the car would be left in the middle of the traffic jam, and it would not be possible to remove it without a helicopter, so they banned jaywalking to prevent sneaky drivers from giving up on their cars. During the week, it was not possible to get out of Boupinel. On Sundays during a long holiday the city was less crowded, instead of giving fines to pedestrians the police went to the beach to make some extra cash, so it was possible to cross on foot. When it rained all exists flooded, there was no way out. In the olden days, there were fewer obstacles, folks would go by oxcart. Then came the administration of the Albanian–Bulgarian–Cambodian Line Party. The PL–ABC forbade international trade of oxcarts — imported oxcarts competed unfairly with the domestic producers. Afterwards came the Negative Economic Plan which banned used oxcart layaway plans in order to control inflation, so during the rainy season half of the students studied at home, the other half lived at school. When it was dry Quartz visited his grandmother, who told stories from the old times, when the university was new.

— There was no library, and books were hard to come by. But there was a fellow named Cerqueira, he was the son of a lawyer who traveled frequently, and had books sent over from France. So we chose the courses according to which books Cerqueira had to share. There was the history course by Professor Gosciny, the founder of the Armorican school, who began his career here in South America..... From France came Charcot, Pinel, Jou Quéry. From Italy Strozzapreti, Polentano, Tagliapazzi.....

— From Spain, was there anyone, Grandma?

— No, Torquemada was not from our time. For controversial subjects they tactfully chose the French.

Feldspato talked about URUBU of his time, his grandmother was not even sure where the new campus was.

— Today we have a library, a vast collection of buildings, with several books each, but no one reads them. The circulation desk requires an up-to-date duplicate of the negative affidavit of late return of books issued by the National Library in Rio de Janeiro. But the National Library is on strike, so the affidavit has not been issued since the class of 8 years ago. That's why the teaching material is all in the form of xerox copies of Powerpoint presentations. No one uses the books anymore. I have been staying at the library for 4 months, near 516.36 Dewey Decimal, and I haven't seen anyone yet.

— Dewey Five Hundred and Sixteen? That is outrageous! There are no curtains at Dewey Five Hundred and Sixteen! It shows lack of respect for oneself.

— Grandma, you know, there is a procurement procedure for university purchases. These things take time. It is a complicated process, you cannot just go to the stores at Rua 25 de Março buy some curtains.

Talking about 25 de Março St, he changed the subject. Grandmother was very fond of Winston, and always asked after him.

— One of my classmates in college was a great uncle of your colleague... Nelson.... Wilson?

— Winston, Grandma.

— Winston! How is he doing? What a fine, cultured young man. Your father knew his family very well.

She meant grandfather, her late husband, Mrs Feldspato's father, the grandson understood, the reader should not get confused.

— There was that Natural Economic Plan in '24. The federals bombarded the Luz neighborhood with packs of devalued milréis² banknotes, the loyalists across the river dumped acquisition embargoes. Whenever the government issued an economic action plan the customers disappeared.

— That's funny, nowadays no one teaches about the Natural Plan of '24 in the history courses at Boupinel. It may be that the facts interfere with the treatment of the major theoretic questions. I am going to look up in the library. There must be something at Dewey 981, I have a buddy who lives there.

His grandmother kept telling stories. She did not imagine that the events of '24 could be interesting for historians, the historians apparently did not either.

— Your father's store and the one your friends family owned were right in the middle, so everybody covered the windows with mattresses for protection against the soldiers. When the shooting stopped they brought the merchandise to the store at Rua José Paulino, and your father took his rags to Rua 25 de Março. This way at least the goods did not all sit still.

They were of course the same shmates, she translated "rags," she had been born in old Rio de Janeiro, and had scant respect for all this small commerce, even her husband's. The exception was the Winston family shop, which was the support of intellectuals, artists, scientists. He was indeed from a better family.

* * *

And talking about the shop, how did Winston manage to get there every afternoon? Often he fetched a ride with Ourinhos. Ourinhos's family was from the countryside, way out in Paraná. In those years the road went to Ourinhos only, the rest was by hoof of mule, hence the nickname. Ourinhos had designed the bank automation system when Bank of Contos de Réis merged with Bank of Contos de Fadas. When he had dough in his hands, he would not let it grow stale. He spent it with all urgency because he knew how banks operated. So he bought a Land Rover. He was the only one who managed to drive over all those abandoned cars. When he visited clients at banks in the city, he often gave Winston a ride.

But..... then they set up the Major in Internet Banking at the School of Automation. Soon the profession of Bank Automation Engineer had been regulated, and the only people who were allowed to sign the maintenance certificates for the system designed by Ourinhos were those who had an accredited bachelor's degree in the field. Ourinhos, who had not graduated yet, had a contract with Bank of Contos do Vigário which was not renewed. The Land Rover broke down, the electronic bank did too. To fix the Land Rover, Ourinhos found it necessary to manufacture the parts at Prof Maxwell's machine shop. Maxwell Junior helped him, already as a boy he was very skillful. About the automatic bank machines, apparently nothing could be done. Fixing them, maybe it would be possible, but Junior did not have a college degree, it would have been illegal. All the machines were scrapped in those times between the Irrational Economic Plan and the Real Plan. Ourinhos got tired, and gave up his studies. The Land Rover I believe is still stored at a neighborhood garage nearby.

²One milréis is worth 1000 reals, and 1000 milréis amount to one conto.

CHAPTER 8

Master and student

My dear reader ought to recall that do his undergraduate studies Quartz did not, he always managed to sneak by with a passing grade according to Ivanov's Least Effort Principle. Until the last year. Then he found himself a job, and soon he was seized by a violent allergic reaction. He was bedridden for two months, with cerebral fever, and he felt like restarting his studies. At URUBU itself, it would not have been so easy. His high school classmates, from whom he had learned all he knew of Phyto-linguistics, suggested that he study abroad. They all met on weekends to fill out forms and study for the standardized tests.

At the institute there was a Professor Smith, who it was said had once been in England. Prof Smith had a great illusion — the Professional School of Philosophy; and a great disappointment — the students, including the ones at the School, and particularly the former students, his faculty colleagues. Our hero had taken Prof Smith's course, and apparently done well. Apparently, I say, because I do not know for sure. Prof Smith sometimes prepared his lectures, sometimes he did not, and he did not grade exams. Thus half of the class had grade 9 out of 10, the other half 6, unless they all had a $7\frac{1}{2}$ or something like that. There was no predictor such as a Smith grade predictor. Anyway, Feldspato, who was not yet a PhD, but was almost a Phyto-linguist, thought he had done well in the subject and went to ask for a letter from Smith. Not a chart from Smith, the one you do not know, that was a different subject. He never understood Smith's Chart, only later when Feldspato had a doctoral student who needed to surf Smith's Chart he had to find out what it was all about.

He went to Smith to ask for a letter. And Prof Smith said that in order to receive such a letter of recommendation from a Faculty member the student was first required to obtain a Master's degree, then a doctorate, and only after reading all the bibliography he would be allowed to start thinking about thinking independently, to apply for a position of assistant page turner to the Reader or the Lecturer, of course if there was an opening at URUBU and then with the Letter of Recommendation in his hands he could try for a post-doctoral fellowship from the official grant agencies, not before signing an irrevocable and permanent labor contract with unextendability clause.

When he heard that, Feldspato almost said what his father would have said: "Do have a good life." (His father, because his grandfather, who had a hotter temper, would have said "For me, this desk of yours is a wooden coffin under the dirt.") He almost said it. Because at that point everything happened as if nothing had happened, and he sort of spoke in the voice of his mother, Mrs Feldspato. "Oh, really? So I am going to do what you suggested and I'll come back later." He did not do it, nor did he come back, of course. Instead of following Professor Smith's advice, he followed Ourinhos's example.

* * *

Of everybody in his class, Ourinhos was the best engineer. He never graduated. Either because he was a good engineer, or because he did not play truco.³ Pity he could not bluff, otherwise between Ourinhos and Madeira, the two of them would always win. But he did not have the luxury because he needed to work: his family could not afford to pay for his studies. Ourinhos was really keen on engineering. That is why he gave up trying to finish school. His father, mother, and grandfather supported his decision wholeheartedly, but they themselves kept on trying to get their degrees. That is why Ourinhos always needed to work. He had a cousin

³Truco is a bluffing game between two doubles, said to have originated in Catalonia and popular in the countryside and in some colleges. The highest cards are the 4 of clubs, the 7 of hearts, the Ace of spades, and the 7 of diamonds.

of a comadre of his godmother's who was an internationally renowned surgeon. So he asked this cousin for some help when he got admitted to study abroad. The cousin of course was not able to help either, that was during the Integer Economic Plan, but the godmother talked with her good friend, who happened to be Winston's grandmother. They were always keen on supporting the arts & sciences, and had even heard of Ourinhos who gave their boy rides to work, so out of the family store there came some cash for the tickets for the godson of the family friend. There went Ourinhos to the Mirkwood Institute of Technology. It is said he did well for himself, he even had classes with Bill Gates's professor, and now he is a technical consultant for science fiction movies.

Some do not take Ourinhos's work seriously, they find this sci-fi business a waste of the investment society made in his education. Or they say that it does not contribute to the improvement of the Human & Social Development Indicators. Go research the patents for the flip phone, the street cleaning robot, whose name can you find? Alright. Then they say that robots cause unemployment, that they eliminate jobs for operators of analog connection panel for mobile telephone, or for highway sweeper. Whoever wants one of those jobs, please stand in line. No candidates, right? Intellectuals find that sweeping streets is a fine job, good for the children of the poor. His own, he would rather see as adjunct master-of-conferences at some public university, though the pay is hardly better. Ourinhos's ideas are not all that bad, are they?

They could have thought about this in those days, when he was trying to graduate. By the way, the original idea for the flip phone had come from the Oyster, believe it or not. Ourinhos was the one to patent it. And he got his doctorate without having finished college... Out there abroad you can. Here, if the university lets one, everybody will want their equal rights, and then how are we going to do?

So that is what Feldspato did, he followed Ourinhos's example, and got his PhD. Those years, when he did not hear from Academician Bertoleza and the Giant Burocrator, are not of much interest to our story. Whoever wants to know about his work with the great Zweifele, may read the scientific literature. It is all in the library, choose any day when there is no strike and go read. Or, if there is a strike, you can check a book out. Nowadays they write about it in popular science books, they are even out in paperback. Take to the beach as summer reading, your friends will be impressed.

CHAPTER 9

In Bigo de Fora

The dearest reader must already be asking, how come our Feldspato ended up in Bigo de Fora? Well he had a distant relative, actually the son of a landsman of his grandfather's, called Manuel, a historian, who was at the Universidade Sidereal of Bigo de Fora. The Sidereal University had an opening because the person who dealt the cards there was Academician Bertoleza, who had once taught the favorite godson of the President of the Republic. So in gratitude the president made sure to authorize the funds for a position, that was before the godson had done those deeds that almost cost the president his re-election, so the supreme council of the department scheduled the registration for the competition on the 31st of April, so no outside challenger would show up with a wheelbarrow full of international journal publications to take the position away from the homegrown candidates. Now on that April the 31st they had also scheduled a competition for federal inspector of drains. Feldspato spent all of his time reading scientific journals rather than the government records, and would never have learned about the competition, had it not been for Manuel, I am not going to write his surname to avoid unsettling the dust. Manuel had been working without pay for several years, so he decided to check out the competition for inspector of federal drains, and he found out that every student of Academician Bertoleza's was going to take part in the same competition for inspector.

Therefore they would not be able to register for the exam at the Universidade Sidereal of Bigo de Fora. Immediately Manuel thought of his father's friend's grandson, Dr Feldspato, the son of Mrs Feldspato, who is extremely competent. He is just back from the United States, where he studied with the most famous psychophysicist Ernest Zweifele, but he was unemployed, and had a family to support. It was an old friendship. Mrs Feldspato's father had stayed with Manuel's father when he came from the old country, a hand in each empty pocket, bringing a valise full of useless trinkets that the Englishmen thought would be possible to sell in the tropics. To keep the story short: Manuel gave him the hint, Feldspato registered, and won the competition. Not that he wanted to go to Bigo de Fora, but he did register. How he managed to pass the exam, that would be material for a novella.

Had he not written more papers than the whole examining committee put together? According to the university hiring procedure statutes, which require hiring by the lowest possible salary and price, he would be disqualified. Hiring him would mean a break with hierarchical decorum, not to mention that all those international journal publications which he might use as an argument to request a promotion represented a lack of dedication to periodicals of circumscribed social impact. Once again, Manuel was the key figure. He had given up on the competition for drain inspector, it was a game with marked cards, and he had stayed back in Bigo de Fora that 31st of April, which in that year coincided with the holiday celebrating the failed *Soulèvement Communiste* against Dr Getúlio. As there was no one else in town — everybody either was watching the federal competition or had taken the long holiday off — he was called in as fourth alternate to the committee to examine Dr Feldspato. Despite the fact that he was still working without pay, regulations were regulations, and the examination had to go on as scheduled. Arguing that to flunk a student of the famous Zweifele would be rather embarrassing, even more so because he was the lone candidate, Manuel had the secretary of the committee read the statutes and discovered that in truth all those papers were not in accord with the edict of the competition as published in the registry of official records. They were in the memoranda but had to be moved to the ignoranda. The edict specified clearly that only works in the area of fabrication of manufacture could be considered. Opportunely a competition in the area of manufacture of fabrication might open, and in that case publications such as those authored by Feldspato might have to be considered, but those were distinct chairs. That saved the crop. As his publication record did not count for anything officially, there could be no obstacle to hiring Dr Feldspato, who was approved with the highest distinction by the unanimous committee.

* * *

And how did it come to pass that Manuel, who had even learned to read the diary of edicts, remained off the payroll for such a long time? That would be another novella. There were two professors, Prof and Prof Figueiredo, from the Social Levitation Department, who had switched genders. So far so good, the University of Bigo de Fora, though located in the middle of the interior heartland, was a lake of tolerance in a desert of prejudice. But it so happened that the customer service unit of the data entry department at the personnel section had decided to economize on punched cards, and recycle the old forms, taking advantage of the fact that the two of them were married and had the same surname and address. But that was in the year of the blackouts. Do you remember the millennium bug? That one that happened without ever taking place? Well it did not happen because the mathematicians at URUBU had everything reckoned out. They had exchanged all the bits for ternary transraptors well beforehand. Thus instead of using bytes of 8 binary bits, the university computers all used bytes of 5 ternary trits. Almost the same thing, $3^5 = 243$ instead of $2^8 = 256$. Some confusion with the Scandinavian students when they had to write the Ås and the Øs in ASCII, but they were few and, Nordic, complained politely. The computers became a little noisy with all those magnetomechanic transraptors switching, but it was domestic homegrown technology, and it avoided the millennium bug, that is what matters. The Sidereal University, of course, would not stay behind, and bought the almost-latest-generation ternary computing equipment from the same supplier that sold to URUBU. (It had even fewer Norwegians.)

The issue with ternary computing was that after day 8 of month 8 of year 88, in nonary base, there would be a next day, and because 3 is the square root of 9, someone made a mistake in converting from nonary base to the decimal base used by the punched tape desk calculators. And no one noticed that the date would fall on the pre-eve of an ante-holiday, when the purchasing & acquisitions department would already be closed for the annual automatic pencil lead & graphite inventory. With that, the issuance of the pro-forma invoices for the importation of spare permanent magnets used in the maintenance of the transraptors got delayed. The solution was to go into the Social Levitation Laboratory discreetly and borrow some magnets, just for a few weeks, until the folks were done resting from the long holiday.

And what did that have to do with Prof Manuel's salary? Sit down, I said it was a novella. Your mother waited for you for nine months, Manuel waited nine years to go back to the payroll, you can wait a little bit as well.

Prof Nimble Hand, I am not going to tell you his real name here, who by coincidence was a friend of Prof Manuel's, went into the Laboratory of Social Levitation and borrowed a few permanent magnets. Did I mention that it was the year of the blackouts? A month after the blackouts in fact. Power had been restored throughout the country. Except to the building of the Ethereal Energy Department, where the Social Levitation Lab was located. Cobbler's children go barefoot. At the smithy, wooden skewers. That joker Nimble Hand took it in stride. Besides his ease opening safes, for which he was deservedly famous, he could see well in the dark. But because of his self confidence he made a mistake, and instead of borrowing some transraptor magnets he borrowed a few new magnets, the fancy neodymium-praseodymium ones. Those magnets were way too strong, and Nimble Hand, expert as he was, would easily have noticed looking at the color coded bands. Now the neodymium magnets were overpainted with switched colorbands, precisely to confuse anyone who, taking advantage of the fact that the laboratory was closed because of the blackout in the previous term, came in to pilfer equipment. Nimble Hand took the magnets coded black-black-black from inside the safe, thinking that the triple zero he needed were kept in the safe as a decoy, and that the pricey white-white-white were inside the drawer whose key was hidden under the mat. He had no way of imagining that the lab technicians would put the pricey 999 magnets precisely inside the safe!

Thus the chargée d'affaires of maintenance in the customer service unit at the data entry department of the personnel section put the rare earth metals supermagnets in the refurbished transraptors of the ternary computer. What had to happen, happened. A trit tilted. When it came the time to key in the new personnel identification numbers for Professor and Professor Figueiredo, instead of re-entering all the data, someone had to force the lever to untill the trit and ended up hitting the elbow on the transraptor of the data bank corresponding to Prof Manuel's records. That made an extra hole in his punch card so there was no way to

print his payroll hollerith card. For several months he kept making the rounds of the bureaus asking for the error to be corrected. He always heard the same answer:

— Professor, you are completely in the right, but we can only effect this alteration with a judicial order. Payroll is a question at the level of Moral and Civic Education, of the Social and Political Organization of the Country. You should please be acquiring, through your attorney, a court mandate issued by the competent authorities, and should be bringing a pleonastic copy in letterhead of the Sidereal University of Bigo de Fora, and in that case we shall be having the greatest satisfaction in being attending to your request.

Professor Manuel thanked, always politely, and proceeded to the Letterhead Section of the Rubber-Stamp Engraving Division.

— Excuse me, please, would it be at all possible to be having the special kindness of informing me how I can be acquiring science with regard to the necessary procedure for obtaining numbered copies of the university's official letterhead?

— Professor, for us to be issuing the letterhead paper Your Honor please be doing us the favor of be coming back in possession of copies of all your recent payroll hollerith cards.

— But I am precisely being without being issued a payroll hollerith card for 9 years. How could I be proceeding? — he would be asking, in an effort of hypercorrection he deemed necessary so as to be making himself understood.

— Then, professor, Your Honor has to be proceeding to the Payroll Hollerith Card Sector in order to be redacting an act of infraction at the level of good faith that needs to be annexed to the document folder of your tenure process.

When he thought he heard the words act-of-faith, auto-de-fé, Manuel was giving up. He was being a man of few luxuries, father of adult children, he was not needing of the salary. Besides that, he was availing himself of a few resources. Feldspato's grandfather, after establishing himself in the commerce of umbrellas, had a cow from Bessarabia sent over, and left it in the care of Manuel's father. Time passed, and Manuel inherited half a dozen cows, maybe 3 or 4 in total. The neighbors came to milk them, and brought corn, legumes, and pulses from the gardens. Hungry he would not go. And he had the copyright to the textbook on the Popular Republic of Brazil.⁴ That earned little, but enough to help with the internet bill, which was his biggest expense.

* * *

Come to think of it, not being in the payroll had some advantages. Almost every day there was a meeting, a committee, a venerable council, examination board, supreme departmental soviet, præsidium, commemoration of ephemerides..... Those who attended, received a snack. Those who missed them, were docked a day's pay. That is why it was so unusual to see a professor in a classroom. As he was not getting paid, there was no way to garnish his earnings. So Manuel could teach, which was what he enjoyed doing. They even tried to prevent him from making unauthorized use of chalk, but then he said:

— I am a professor, and I will stop teaching when I am dead or in prison. If teaching without pay is a crime, go call the municipal guard to drag me away from the lecture hall. Outward loss, inward gain.

And that is where things stood. Manuel even found it amusing, not being paid, the annoying thing was when the colleagues insisted on asking whether the situation had been resolved, or suggested the name of a good lawyer who was well-known to the faculty union folks. Manuel had little patience for that, and the situation dragged on. Do you know who ended up solving the disputation? You got it, our Dr Feldspato. Not simply doctor, the Right Honorable Mr Professor Dr Feldspato.

⁴<http://manueltenide.zip.net/>

CHAPTER 10

Sans faire de bruit, la mer efface

Yes, I said I was going to tell you about Carolina. She had no patience for taking exams, so she was not admitted into URUBU. Would you have guessed that she studied precisely at the Sidereal University of Bigo de Fora? Just her, who was so shy, went to college so far from home. But she did not change a bit, do not worry, this story has a happy ending. As the rest of our characters, after graduation she wanted to keep studying. And who was her advisor? Now you got it: Academician Bertoleza, Chaired Professor of the Superior School of the Office of Philosophy at the Rupestrian University of Boupinel.

(The attentive reader shall notice that the school changed names, after the Popular Revolution. Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose. It was Winston who always repeated this refrain.)

Carolina suffered a lot of prejudices at Boupinel. First, she had graduated from Bigo de Fora, she was not part of the institution. Second, her family was old fashioned, sort of religious, the people at Boupinel did not quite get comfortable with that. The issue really was that she was a woman, nevertheless she did not take orders and did not work exactly the way she was supposed to like everybody else. They could not tell if she was white with a dark face, or black with a light complexion. She was not a good fit in any department, so they treated her poorly. Her only source of support was the advisor, Academician Bertoleza. The support did not help much, because she was about to have a nervous breakdown and gave up.

Her daughter thinks she did not miss out on much. Right, our Prof Dr Feldspato learned the whole story from Carolina's older daughter, who is a musician, a composer and soloist of worldwide fame. She gives concert tours, even appears as a guest in the evening TV shows, but she is stubborn — like mother, like daughter — and does not sing country music, so she cannot pay her bills with the concerts alone. So she teaches preschool. That is how Feldspato met her.

After his lectures Feldspato went to pick his daughter up in kindergarten. Late in the afternoon the kids had music. He knew the teacher, but neither her face nor her name were familiar. One day he had invited Edson for dinner. Traffic was awful — Bigo de Fora was becoming as unbearable as Boupinel. They abandoned the car in the middle of the highway and walked the rest of the way, so they arrived to the school earlier than usual. Music was still going on. At the piano, the teacher entertained the kids with Brahms number 2, whistling the orchestral parts. Feldspato and Edson looked at each other, astonished. One could not fail to recognize the voice. Carolina's daughter. When school was over they sat there gossiping. "Edson, weren't you a friend of Aviva's, my mother's friend who studied medicine and then became orthodox?" They knew a few people in common. She told the story of when her mother started her graduate studies at Boupinel. Carolina had a job, and he boss, a swarthy Eastern European fellow, also aspired to the title of Master's. One day he came up with a lame attempt of a joke: "So, Carolina, is it true that to get the Master's diploma there at Boupinel you need to take off your clothes for the beadle?" Carolina told her daughter the answer she gave: "I don't know, did you?"

* * *

"I think what is missing is a deeper psychological development of the characters."

"I wish I could understand better the feelings of these people from Boupinel, from Bigo de Fora."

“Come on, is nothing ever gonna happen in this story?”

Do I still have any readers expecting unexpected revelations, intimate secrets, impossible romances, unfathomable passions? Our characters are geeks. They understand the rules of the game, compute probabilities, make decisions under incomplete information, and bear the consequences. *Maktub*. They are happy, or at least accepting of fate. Against the world’s imperfections they oppose an occasional eccentricity. Happy people are all alike. There is no original story to tell.

Some daytime soap opera fans apparently expect depictions of our creatures, their inner lives. Or at least personal details, reports of their relationships and loves. A crystal ball, you think I have? I know nothing of that sort, can I read thoughts?

Even if I knew, I would not tell. I have nothing to tell. Nothing that could persuade an astute book shopper to bid farewell to a pair of hard-earned coppers. So I am not telling.

* * *

There was only one thing that left Feldspato a little sad. He missed his friends from the old times, Ourinhos, Madeira, Carolina. Edson, he met sometimes, but Winston, Aviva, the Oyster, those folks all spread out. When something reminded him of the old friends, a furtive tear came down his face. That I know, I have seen with these own eyes of mine that the Earth is bound to consume.

Done. Did you not ask for a schmaltzy passage? That was it. Enough now. You wanted more? Get Mexican television in cable. And do not turn the volume high because I have a partial differential equation to solve.

CHAPTER 11

Digital fingerprints

And how was it that Feldspato solved the problem for his compadre Manuel? The details of this story cannot appear in print, they would leave digital fingerprints everywhere. Let us see what we are licitly allowed to explain.

The dear reader knows very well that the faculty is not allowed to read the university statutes. Any violation of this policy is immediately reported to the Office of Dialectic Inquisition. It is well recognized that chaos would result if each faculty member decided to interpret on his own volition the edifice of official charters that underpins the organization of the legal and — why should we not add? statutishmentary — persona that is known to be constitutionally inalienable to the consecution of the regimentally mission-critical activities of an institution with the relevance that, without a shadow of doubt, is conferred in an indissoluble, incontrovertible, and indefeasible manner to the Universidade Rupestrian of Boupinel, or rather, to the Universidade Sidereal of Bigo de Fora. In the terms of the law. Data venia. All dispositions in contrary being revoked. It would be impossible to resolve the resulting singularities. Indefectibly we should find ourselves in the presence of a dissolution of continuity, and extroversion of sensibility to initial conditions. It would be chaos. A statutory and regimental obstruction to the consecution of said mission-critical activities.

That is precisely why reading of the statutes was reserved to the incumbents of chaired professorships. And there was no case in living memory where a donship had been awarded to someone who was not capable of quoting the statutes by heart, just so as to avoid that a printed copy should get lost and fall in the hands of a subversive. A hardcopy did exist, but it was printed in invisible ink, written in archaic Javanese, and kept under lock and key. Kept where? That I do not know, you need to ask THE..... what was his name? THE..... come on, you know, THE supervisor in charge, who works with THE business partner of the glassmaker's workshop.

“With THE partner in the glassmaker's workshop? THE employee who is not very assiduous, THE one who knows the combination to the vault where the bus tokens and meal tickets reserved exclusively for use by the dons during ceremonial occasions are kept, together with the architectural drawings of the campus buildings?”

Yes, with THE business partner in the glassmaker's workshop, THE employee who is not very assiduous, THE one who knows the combination of the vault which stores, stapled together with the 8 and 1/2 inch floppy disks which used to contain the architectural blueprints, the bus tokens and meal tickets reserved for use by the dons during ceremonial occasions, and whose key is hidden under the mat in front of the cabinet in the meeting room of the Sidereal University Faculty Club.

“Right, doesn't he have this information, THE partner in the glassmaker's workshop?”

How should I know, who can find him to ask? Didn't you tell me yourself that he is not very assiduous? Come on, you know that is a tremendous euphemism. If he ever knew, he would have forgotten by now. If you need something from the vault, you ask Prof Nimble Hand for help. The worst kept secret on campus is that Nimble Hand is good at opening safes. His digital fingerprints are everywhere. Because Nimble Hand is not simply good at cracking safes. The maintenance of the electric and pneumatic power system for the whole campus, it is Maxwell who does.

Alright, now I spilled the beans. He himself. Maxwell Junior! The son of Prof Maxwell and the Fourth Lady Maxwell. There is no reason now, if once there was, to keep his name in secret. We all know that he

runs the campus maintenance early in the morning, between 8 and 10, during the coffee break that begins every workday. His actions are anti-constitutional to an extreme. In flagrant contravention to the Procurements Law, the Statutes of Public Service. They infringe the Collective Bargaining Convention and bootleg the Warsaw Pact. Were it not for bootlegging, nothing would work.

Prof Maxwell Junior takes his vacations methodically, germanically, always a month, always during the dry season. But it does rain during the dry season, and when it does, power fails. Then the computers — except for the hand-crank ones — only work again after his vacation. Hence the functionaries at the Department of Statutory Charters and Other Official Obstructions to the Consecution of Mission-Critical Activities, which underpin the organization of the legal edifice of the Sidereal University of Bigo de Fora, never take their vacations during this period, because if they are lucky and rain falls early on in the month, the computers stop and presto! — here is a whole month without the bother of having to find excuses for doing nothing. Now when the Office of Dialectic Inquisition is open, with full staff, nothing irregular happens at the university. Maybe if someone were on vacation something funny could happen, because blame could be assigned to that someone who is not there. But with full staff, if something irregular were to happen, the Office would gain awareness, an academic inquisition would be effected. If awareness was not gained, and there was no inquisition, that is because nothing had happened. Everything came to pass as if nothing had occurred. As ever.

CHAPTER 12

Establishmentutarian Litanies

Now everything must be getting clear. Prof Feldspato is very competent. He is just back from the United States, where he studied with the most famous psychophysicist, Ernest Zweifele. He is the son of Mrs Feldspato. His sister is a surgeon. Well, he had a great debt with Prof Manuel. The Sidereal University of Bigo de Fora, granted, has an even bigger debt, one that can be measured in terms of dollars and cents, subject to compound interest and cost-of-living adjustments. What did he do?

He took advantage of Maxwell's yearly vacation abroad, when the bureaucrats never took time off, meaning, they did nothing at all. And took possession of the original Establishmentutarian Litanies — this being the perfect and most faithfull translation of the Javanese original. And how did he know? Javanese, imagine such a thing! If he had shown no interest in the most elementary notions of Pig Latin Grammar..... Edson's holographic memory was providential. Not that he knew any Javanese, of course — you may recall he only went to the lectures at the Auditorium to have a siesta.

— You remember that Carolina read poetry during the Accounting lectures?

— But of course I do! I made paper airplanes, and you, who had taken Dactyloscopy in your freshman year because at home it was hard to sleep without being disturbed, computed trajectories by solving the Navier-Stokes equations.

— I doubt I would have put it in these terms, but anyway Carolina read and wrote Classical Javanese fluently. Is it possible that.....?

— Edson, you are a genius! Well, that is no big news. Let us ask!

Said and done. Carolina's daughter had already composed a children's opera in one and a half acts from a ancient Javanese libretto. She gobbled up the Establishmentutarian Litanies. Now the three of them were the only ones who had the least notion of the document's content.

"Hello. Yes please? If it is still on show? Yes it is, Sunday at 2 PM at the Barafunda Theater. Spoken and sung in Portuguese, no knowledge of Javanese necessary. There are tickets available. Imaginary? The tickets can be paid with frozen Imaginary money, but please bring the tips for the ushers in Reals. Wait, wait a second, let me turn off the voice transcription software..... I can't find the menu..... Well anyway. Yes, myself, you know, after the Complex Economic Plan professors are having to moonlight somewhere. Please, get there on time, we are trying to stick to the schedule closely, do not miss the beginning. That is correct, an act and a half. There is a Chico Buarque song alright, but the censorship inspector is a jolly good fellow, you may bring the children, his tip is included."

I apologize for the interruption. Where was I anyway? Yes, Manuel's back pay, and the statutishmentary litanies. Feldspato got his hands on them, in an absolutely regular manner, despite his lack of a chaired donship,

inasmuch as nothing irregular could happen under the implacable vigilance of the fully staffed Dialectic Office, which anyway never gained awareness. With the Litanies in his custody, he made two phone calls. Soon the back pay started showing up in Manuel's account, and not in Imaginary money but in Reals, because it was a previous debt, an acquired Right. The incredible thing is that no trouble resulted.

There was someone in Physics for Education, in the major of basket weaving of the basketball department if I remember well, imagine, a very defender of avant-guard theses, who made a proposal for the instauration of an inquisition tribunal to investigate whether Maxwell was taking his vacations outside the period registered in his Labour and Leisure License. A quick phone call to Winston at the Olympic Sports Committee solved the problem before it came up:

— Feldspato, such a long time! Of course I remember. I knew him well. I did not take Prof Maxwell's course, but whenever Ourinhos's car broke down it was Junior who worked things out. He made miracles! If it were not for him, Ourinhos would never get that car moving, and I would never reach grandpa's store. Ad hoc committee? Subcommittee with well-defined goals? Oh yeah, I have seen this movie already. Wake me up for the car chase. Leave it with me. Department of Basketball Weavery Sciences, you said, right? Not a problem..... I will talk to them. Really, very much. A lot of running around, but invite me and I will come.

And conveniently..... Feldspato was not a full professor. So he did not need to go to meetings and was not required to join committees and councils. Edson, for instance, had to go, else they would dock his pay. Not that it made any difference, considering how little the pay amounted to, but in the end he had to go. Now Feldspato sat on a cushion on the floor of his 17 tatami office. If someone wanted to talk to him, they had to remove their shoes before walking in. In the office he had a splendid goban made of environmentally certified tropical hardwood, cultivated in the Indigenous Sustainable Extractive National Forest of Alto Xingu.

But where can the Litanies be found? Who did he call, what did he say? How was it possible to get around the regulations of the Architectural Procurement Service? How did he manage to persuade the Legal-Financial Advisory Office to accept a donation of equipment without overhead? Most incredible, how did the Tagging Service consent to depatrimonialize the termites of the brand-new secondhand furniture that had been bought at the lowest tendered price?

That I cannot answer. Only Feldspato knows. Carolina's daughter and Edson wanted to help, but that is the limit of what they cared for. The one who has access to the Javanese originals is Feldspato. He never told me anything, nor will he ever. For my own safety — and for that of my friends, he knows I talk more than I should, that I have spilled the beans before. I am truly grateful to him for the laconism. If the reader knew what I know, he would be as well. Thankful. Truly. Grateful. Indeed.

"You have been talking about Edson a lot, you are not going to tell me he also ended up in Bigo de Fora. Even Edson?"

I can explain it all, apologies for the lack of clarity. Edson held a chair at URUBU. One week perhaps, the next one for sure, the syndicate went on strike. They closed off the campus. During the strikes he visited his uncle in Uberaba to read his email. Then he often dropped by Bigo de Fora, which was located nearby.

* * *

Prof Feldspato had memorized the Establishmentutarian Litanies to lend a helping hand to his godfather Manuel. But after having gone through the effort, he decided to maximize the return on his investment. He had a ball, he painted the town red. The Law of Party Allegiance was revoked — it ordained suspension of tenure for lack of ideological coherence, a point for which there was no statutishmentary support. The functionaries of the Tribunal of Academic Office were reassigned, so it is better to be careful anyway. Payment of the pension to Benê's adopted son was normalized, the legal obstructions vanished. I had felt sorry for him, once he had gotten sick his colleagues abandoned him, it is as if they were afraid of contagion. The issue with the Javanese language program got resolved: no longer it kept jumping back and forth from the Department of Eastern Languages to

the Department of Classical Languages at each council meeting. “Foundations of Scientific Polpotism II” was no longer part of the core curriculum. Supply of solar energy was outsourced. With a company run by one of Maxwell’s former students in charge, the bill always came in credit, bringing a tidy income for the scholarship fund. And Maxwell was given back his research grant, which had been canceled for lack of relevance with respect to the three axes, the patriotic, social, and psycho–historic ones.

The verbs were employed in the passive voice because do, Feldspato did not do anything. At least not he himself in person. He was not a full chaired professor, so he simply worked in his office, and every now and then he would send a handwritten note obliquely alluding to the litanies that could solve each and every question.

“Handwritten notes? Ugh, that sounds like something coming from Mayor Jânio Quadros.... But what did the notes say? Are you telling me that you didn’t find the paradoxes?”

They said things that cannot be put into words, that make themselves manifest. What is mystical. Feldspato had so to speak thrown away the ladder, after he had climbed up on its steps. He cannot talk to anyone about the content of the notes. One does not have anyone to talk to. Whereof one does not have anyone to talk about, thereof one must be silent, according to a continental philosopher, or maybe it was an insular mathematician who first said it, in any case, a fellow from Zweifele’s khalyastre, whose books had been banned from Boupinel. I can only imagine that they had something to do with the Undecidability Theorem. After all, the Litanies were perfect. They resolved all open questions. All of them. And more. Had solved, were solving, would solve. In finite time. For as long as necessary. Unambiguously. Completely. Truly. And falsely. Yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Truly contradictory. Generation after generation. Incontrovertible. True and false. Without mistakes. Or exceptions. With all of them. Beyond good and evil. Once and for all. Twice. Three times. Never. Just pick and choose. Through the handwritten notes. Or not. But carefully. Remember: Feldspato is the one who knows the work of Zweifele well.

* * *

Best of all were the opportunities to meet the old friends. Winston started coming to give talks. Carolina visited her daughter, the Oyster came to discuss some new projects. After decades wondering in the valley of the shadow of Mordor, Madeira had no fear, he was back in Brazil, he had gotten into academia. Ourinhos showed up to receive an honorary degree at commencement — conferred precisely by the department that flunked him out for the last and final time. Without resentment — from either side. How can that be? Feldspato smiled, almost smugly.

"Wha da U mean ain't no bad feelings? How come U know? U yourself written there U got no crystal ball to go round readin' no thoughts. What the hell had to go rehabilitate the name of that damn communist who went vote afterwards against the Movimentation? Then U go sayin' no hard feelings? What for did U put there the name of that lousy queer for? When there are out there all our jobless comrades there eatin' the dough that the devil had kneaded on account of that junk .e.c.o.l.o.g.i.c.a.l. energy there from some other planet, imported there from the Sun, dunno what country they bringin' that privatized energy source from those sons of....."

Terribly sorry. You know how the world wide web is. It is hard to moderate the postings of a hotheaded fellow. Good thing about the internet is that any clown can publish whatever they want. Good thing about democracy is that no one is forced to read. Think about that, next time you go to the polls.

Myself, I am going to make a backup, install a security update in the system’s antivirus. I will do a zero order dump, next week I finish the story. And you, have you backed up all of your files lately? Remember, your drive will fail sooner or later, and the gigabyte of extra space retails for a couple of groschen.

CHAPTER 13

`/sbin/dump -0 -f /dev/papr/acidfree`

This is the place where I get to answer reader's letters. There were a few complaints about the part concerning elections and backups last week. "This is starting to read like a self-help book," they wrote. Well, we are wrapping things up here. And your drive *will* fail sooner or later. Do not then say that I did not tell you. By the way, it is worth updating to T_EXLive 2008, version 3.1415926 ironed out a few corners in L^AT_EX. Hard to believe, at this point in the game. Oldest useful piece of software.

Yes it was without resentment. Feldspato did not go to meetings, so he had no enemies. When they ran into each other in the hallway, he did not fail to greet Prof Lúcio Flávio, an Argentine who had lost his chair when "The Teachings of Solano López" was left out of the required reading list and now had assumed a coordinatorship in the commission for studies of repairs to the 8½ inch floppy disks stapled together with the architectural blueprints, bus tokens, and meal tickets, which now could be used by any faculty member on an as-needed basis. He got along with everybody. Had long chats, just imagine, with the Academician Bertoleza. Whenever she came to Bigo de Fora to take part in a Habilitation & Tenure committee, she found the time to have a cup of coffee, throw a little conversation away, and push wood. If you consider how long an examination by a Habilitation committee can last, finding time of course was the least problem.

— So then, Quartz, still playing Go? — She called him by the old nickname.

— I am a little out of shape, Dilema — he called the Academician by her given name, which few knew and fewer even dared use — but fetch a cushion and fill me in on the latest from Boupinel. Is traffic any better with the new Metro line?

— Oh, I will not even tell you. With this inflation, no one takes the subway, because you need to pay before the ride. Everybody prefers to grab a taxi, so they can invest money during the ride using the cell phone. The number of taxis that get abandoned when the driver runs out of gas and cannot fill up because the passenger's cell phone has a dead battery..... Traffic has stopped for good. But talking about clamshell cell phone, I saw the new movie produced by your classmate, the one who became a soccer referee.

— Winston! He will come for a screening at the Student Union here.

He was such good friends with everybody, that slowly he was forced to begin doing things he would rather have someone else not do in his stead. Committees, awards, prizes, ceremonies, those types of events. It was impossible to say no every time. Against his will and better judgement, there was less and less time left for science. He gave fewer and fewer lectures — until his teaching load got so infinitesimal that he was promoted.

After he became a don he framed an enormous blow-up of that famous picture of his adviser to decorate his office. The great Zweifele at the harpsichord, hammer in his hand, happily drumming with notes. A prankster. Irreverent. Free. By then it was already too late.

* * *

One day he received a phone call from Madeira, his classmate who had fallen into academic life.

— Hi there, Quartz, wouldn't you want to come here to the Independent University teach some classes on new applications of those oscillators we used to build in the good old times? One of these Wednesdays?

— I cannot, — he answered — on Wednesdays I have to go by cab acquire some envelopes to take to the meetings of the preparatory commission for the Commemorative Event of the One-Thousandth Seven-Hundredth Twenty-Ninth Day of the Administration of the Commission for Celebrating the Ephemerides, with Professors Lippy and Hardy.

He hung up crying. Dry tears. He had managed. Finally. He loved Giant Burocrator.

THE END